



THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

Reforming Higher Education to Secure Ohio's Future

Interested Party Testimony
Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Ohio Senate Bill 83

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April 19, 2023

As Prepared for Delivery

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding reshaping Ohio’s higher education system to meet the needs of the 21st century.

My name is Greg R. Lawson. I am the research fellow at **The Buckeye Institute**, an independent research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

American higher education has long been the envy of the world. Unfortunately, rising tuition costs, administrative bloat, speech codes, and a lack of ideological academic diversity, have tarnished higher education’s reputation for properly preparing the next generation. Many of these problems are systemic or cultural and will not be solved with policy changes overnight. But policy reforms can play a part and **Senate Bill 83** lays a solid foundation on which to build.

The bill, for example, reinforces support for the First Amendment by amending university mission statements to positively reaffirm a commitment to free and open intellectual inquiry, independent thought, and viewpoint diversity. The bill would curtail **questionable mandatory** trainings on campus that smack of **compelled speech** and have proven **ineffective and counterproductive** while also being **criticized** by leading academics in the area of implicit bias. These and other reforms have become regrettably necessary as 80 percent of surveyed students **report** self-censoring, and professors and visiting lecturers are infamously **shouted down** or administratively **punished** for their opinions or allegedly violating campus “speech codes.” Such incidents erode taxpayer confidence that their public colleges and universities remain intellectually diverse and open to an honest exchange of ideas.

Senate Bill 83 would also improve faculty tenure policies over time by requiring robust post-tenure reviews. Tenure provides significant benefits for faculty and students insofar as it secures rigorous academic debate, intellectual inquiry, and independent research. But tenure can also protect staff who stifle academic inquiry and debate, and it contributes to bloated payrolls by **failing** to align financial incentives with job performance. To improve tenure policies, the bill requires a post-tenure review for tenured faculty who receive a “*does not meet performance expectations*” evaluation within the same evaluated category for two out of three consecutive years. That will help as far as it goes, but more strident reform would be even better. Florida, for example, recently passed **legislation** mandating five-year reviews of all tenured faculty, regardless of annual evaluation ratings. Such reviews—if done carefully and without infringing on academic freedom—could help keep faculty accountable and spur productivity. Alternatively, as Dr. Richard Vedder has **suggested**, tenure could become an optional component of faculty compensation, allowing universities to pay more to those who *voluntarily* choose not to accept tenure’s protections.

Other notable improvements include disallowing public university faculty to strike and extending to public faculty the same **statutory negotiating procedures** that public safety and some public health workers use; and ensuring that course syllabi at public universities are transparent and publicly available.

These are timely steps in the right direction, but the General Assembly should take several more.

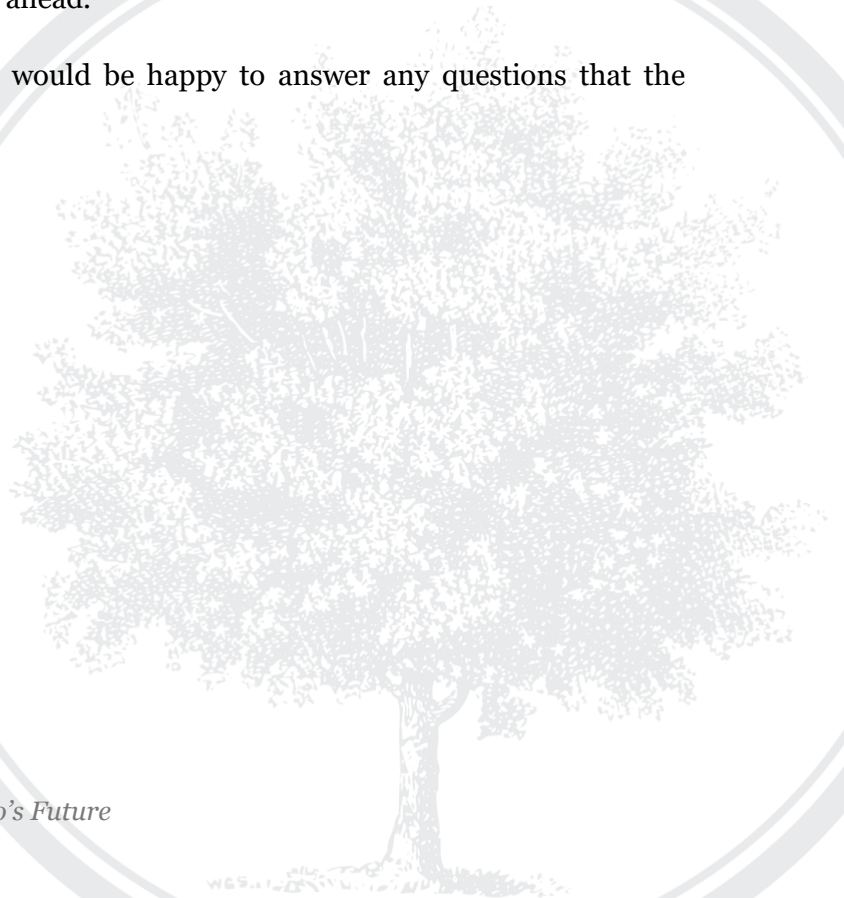
Ohio should cap the bloated administrative expenses at state universities that make college even more expensive for families and taxpayers. The American Council of Trustees and Alumni **found** that from 2010 to 2018 the cost of noninstructional spending has grown three times faster than in classroom spending. The Ohio State University, to take just one **example**, has nearly 132 employees in diversity, equity, and inclusion offices alone at a cost of \$13.4 million per year. Whatever their merits, these are not instructional positions to prepare and equip students to meet the challenges of the 21st century workplace, but they do add to the tuition bill.

If state-funded universities want to receive generous taxpayer support, the General Assembly should reasonably restrict university expenses. Schools that exceed those limits should see their state share of instruction (SSI) allocation reduced by an equal amount. Ohio should also align the SSI's two- and four-year state funding streams with better post-graduation outcomes, financially rewarding schools that graduate students with more manageable debt-to-earnings ratios and better workforce credentials.

A more dramatic reform would take a page from the school choice playbook and give vouchers directly to students rather than simply subsidizing colleges. Policymakers should not underestimate the transformative strength of a free market that empowers students and incentivizes universities to compete for students and state dollars rather than rely on an opaque and complex subsidy formula.

Senate Bill 83 should help address some of the problems plaguing Ohio's higher education system, but much work still remains to further reduce costs, align institutional incentives, and better prepare our students for the future that lies ahead.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee might have.



About The Buckeye Institute

Founded in 1989, The Buckeye Institute is an independent research and educational institution – a think tank – whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

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